

Statement of Jessica St. Pierre
U.S. Citizen, Negatively Impacted by E-Verify
House Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Social Security
Hearing on the Social Security Administration's Role in Verifying Employment Eligibility
April 14, 2011

My name is Jessica St. Pierre and I am a U.S. citizen, born and raised in Florida. On November 09, 2010, my life changed forever because I was fired due to an error in the employment verification system called E-Verify. I was wrongly identified as not having employment authorization. After my firing, I remained unemployed for months. This is my story.

I was fired from my job despite providing supporting documents to government agencies and my employer and explaining over and over again that I was authorized to work in the United States. At first, my employer indicated that there was problem with my work authorization and suggested I visit the Social Security Administration (SSA) office. My father and I went to my local SSA office and they told us everything was correct in their system. This office gave me a print-out indicating that my information matched, but the print-out did not indicate that I was work-authorized. After my first trip to the SSA office, I told my employer about the document and they said it wasn't enough, noting that "Well that's not what it says in our system." It was only then that my employer told me that they were using E-Verify and that the program indicated that there was an error.

As the days and weeks passed, I tried to correct this error, in vain, in numerous ways. For example, the following week, I went down to a legal services organization and they referred me to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC). When I talked with my local EEOC office, they told me that I didn't really have case but advised me to call E-Verify and find out what was going on. I took the advice and immediately researched the number to E-Verify. I called the hotline and waited almost an hour just to hear the representative say that after running my name in the system that everything is okay. I felt relieved and I asked if she could send that documentation in the mail so that I could take it back to my employer. She said that she could not send me this information, but could contact my employer. I said okay and asked her to do so. Again, I could not receive any information

confirming E-Verify's error. Despite the call from the E-Verify program, my employer still could not straighten out this mess. I thought a call from E-Verify to my employer would get my job back, but I contacted the employer and was told there was nothing I could do to get my job back. In desperation, I went back to my local SSA office and received the same print-out—the document that had failed me before—from SSA staff.

Angry and frustrated, I thought I knew this wasn't right. I have done everything right, including going to all the proper agencies to get this situation resolved. What else is a worker supposed to do? I was hurt and because I felt helpless and like there was nothing that I could do even though I followed all the right steps. I had decided to just give up but then decided to Google exactly what I got fired for "failure to provide employment eligibility". I was shocked to find an article on what I was going through and with that article were other stories of people who are US citizens going through the exact same thing! I was not alone and now I knew there was a number that I could call to share my story and I did. In the month of December I contacted the National Immigration Law Center and they were ready to help free of charge. They did everything in their power to get me the answer that I was looking for. As it turns out, the employer had placed two spaces after my last name which prompted an SSA tentative nonconfirmation (TNC). Four months later in February 2011, I met with the employer and they claimed I could come back to my position. However, after being out of work over 3 months, I have since moved on to another company. Though my current position has significantly lower pay, I realized that the money wasn't what motivates me. This employer didn't put me through the E-Verify rollercoaster ride, so I decided to stay with my new job. I would like to take this time out to thank the NILC for all of their time, patience, and hard work. For I know without them I probably would have never known that there was an answer to my problem.